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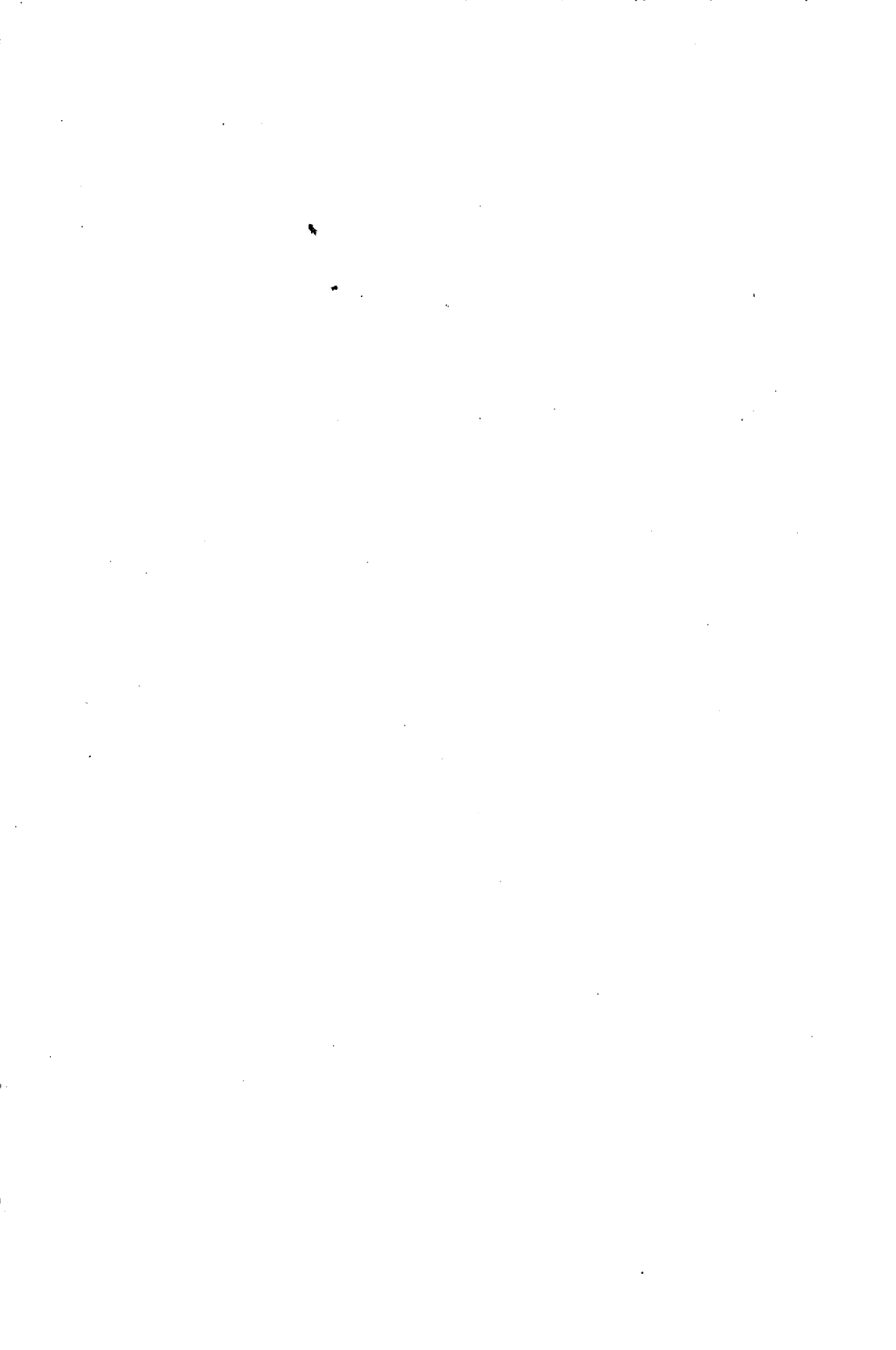
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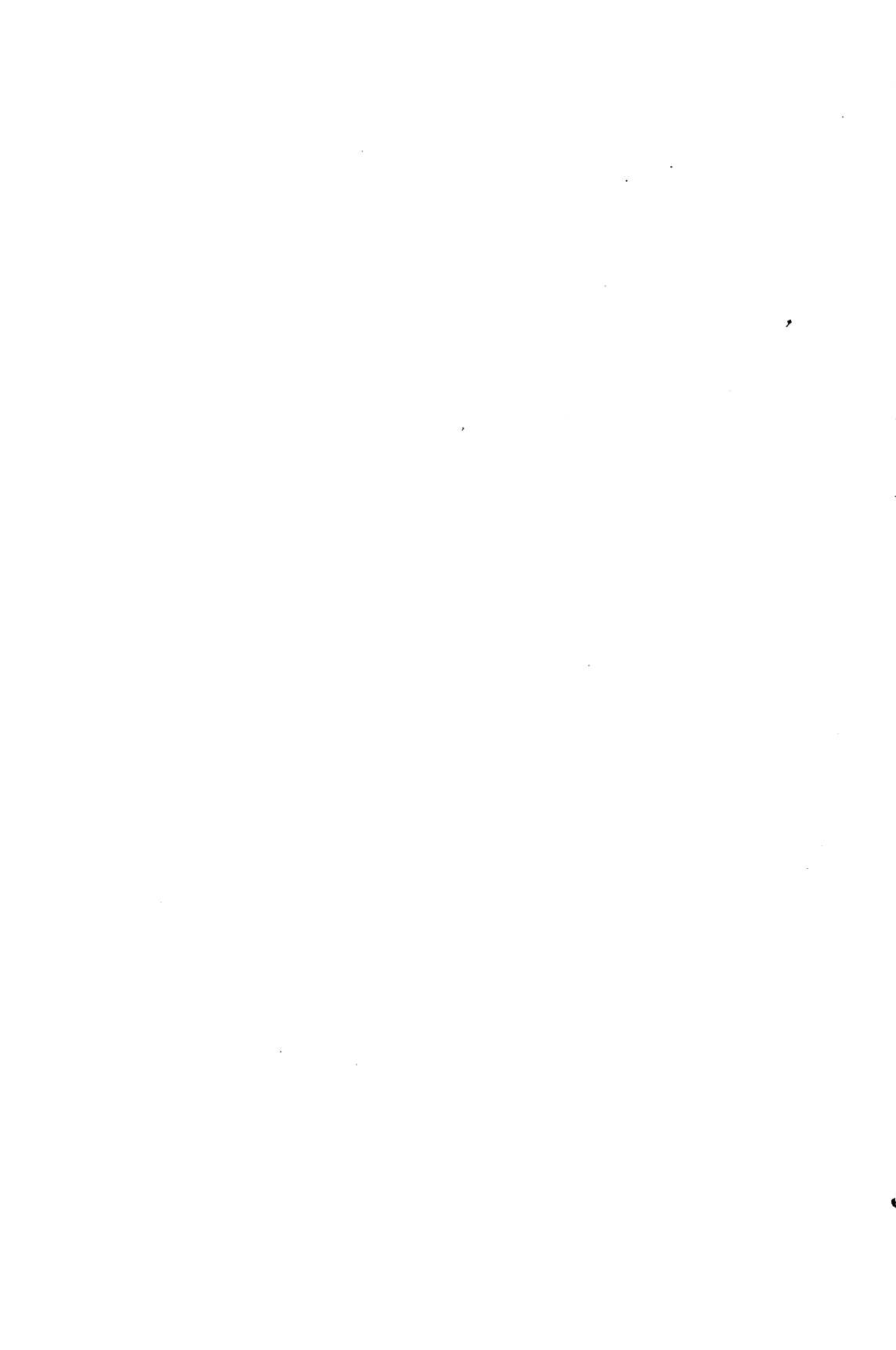
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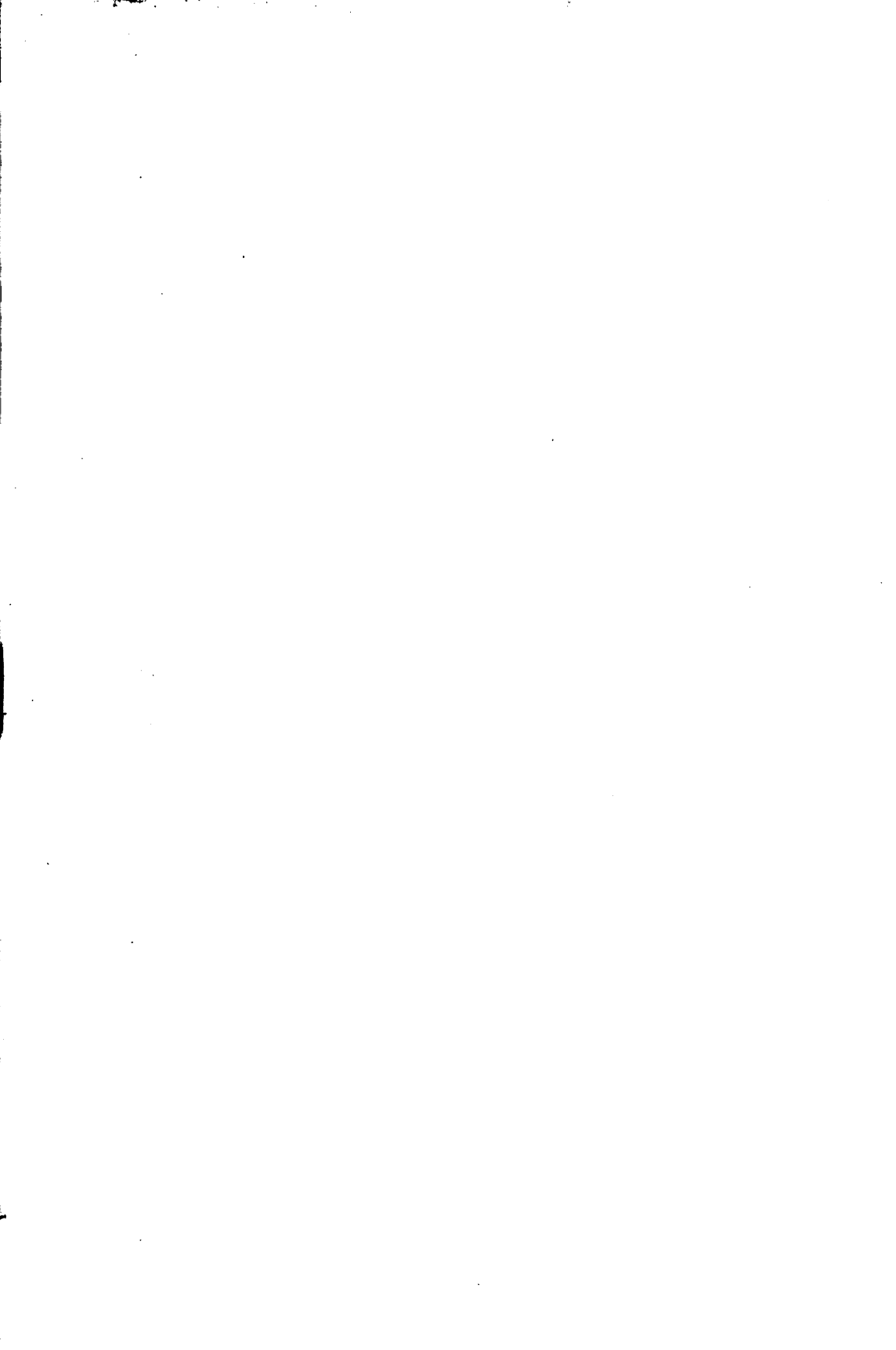
ORESTES

ANDRÉ TRIDON

AND

ARTHUR GUITERMAN







ORESTES

(Les Erinnyes)

A DRAMA IN TWO PARTS

BY

Leconte de Lisle

PART I: CLYTAEMNESTRA

PART II: ORESTES

ADAPTED BY

ANDRÉ TRIDON AND ARTHUR GUITERMAN

THE BRANDON PRESS

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ORESTES

ANDRÉ TRIDON

AND

ARTHUR GUITERMAN



DRAMATIS PERSONÆ

AGAMEMNON, KING OF ARGOS.

CLYTAEMNESTRA, HIS QUEEN.

ORESTES, THEIR SON.

ELECTRA, THEIR DAUGHTER.

CASSANDRA, A PROPHETESS, PRIESTESS OF APOLLO, AND DAUGHTER
TO PRIAM, KING OF ILIOS.

TALTHYBIOS }
EURYBATES } ELDERS OF ARGOS.

CALLIRHOE }
ISMENA } CAPTIVE TROJAN WOMEN, SERVING AS CHOEPHORI OR
LIBATION-BEARERS.

THE WATCHMAN.

AN ATTENDANT.

THE ERINYES OR FURIES, CHORUS OF ELDERS, CHORUS OF CHOEPHORI,
WARRIORS, SEAMEN, TROJAN CAPTIVES, CLYTAEMNESTRA'S
MAIDS, CITIZENS.



ORESTES

PART I: CLYTAEMNESTRA

THE ACTION TAKES PLACE IN ARGOS IMMEDIATELY AFTER THE FALL OF TROY. SCENE: THE OUTER PORTICO OF PELOPS' ANCIENT PALACE. HEAVY ARCHITECTURE. BROAD, CONICAL COLUMNS WITHOUT BASE. IN THE BACKGROUND, THE CITY OF ARGOS IS SEEN BETWEEN THE COLUMNS. THE STAGE IS DARK. THE ERINYES, APPEARING AS OLD WOMEN, TALL, PALLID, SKELETON-LIKE, DRAPED IN LONG, WHITE GOWNS, THEIR HAIR FLOWING OVER THEIR FACES AND SHOULDERS, ARE SKULKING ABOUT. THE DAY BREAKS; THEY DISAPPEAR.

THE ARGIVE ELDERS, LEANING ON LONG STAVES, ENTER FROM THE BACK AND DIVIDE INTO TWO SEMI-CHORUSES TO RIGHT AND LEFT. TAL-
THYBIOS AND EURYBATES, HEADING THE SEMI-CHORUSES, ADVANCE TO-
WARD EACH OTHER.

Scene I.

TALHYBIOS, EURYBATES. CHORUS OF ELDERS.

TALHYBIOS:

Belovèd Elders, here ye wait in vain.
Ten long years since, the great kings fared away
In ram-prowed ships. A hundred thousand oars
Like wings of flocking birds aroused at dawn
In thunder smote the sounding waves that bore
The sons of Hellas, armed, to break the pride
Of Ilios.—And who of all that host
Returns, warrior or captain!

EURYBATES:

O ye Gods of Greece!
So many heroes! ai! so many ships!

TALHYBIOS:

Alas for all the heroes, all the ships.
Oh, countless spears that dent the rounded shields!
Oh, countless steeds that champ the foam of death!
Oh, maddened rush of empty chariots,
Hoarse-throated howls, deep groans, the clang of swords,
And writhing forms transfixed with javelins
Upon the reddened field!

EURYBATES:

Olympian Gods!
For but a woman, how much war and woe!

TALHYBIOS:

Decrepit, old and lorn, with staves in hand,
We linger here to brood o'er fireless hearths
Bewailing sons cut down in youthful strength.

ORESTES

EURYBATES:

And like to ghosts we roam a cheerless earth.

TALTHYBIOS:

He never will return—the godlike son
Of Atreus. O ye oracles, declare
What floods of wine, of unmixed wine outpoured
In rich libations—say, what hecatombs
Of sheep or fattened beeves will ere appease
The fell Erinyes!—they the vengeful ones
That haunt by day and night this foul abode,
This lair of treason, prison-house of hate,
Accursèd scene of ancient crimes—

EURYBATES:

Be still!

Too weak to act, we needs must hold our peace.
A woman rules; that woman's heart of flint
No more awaits the godlike chief we loved,
Our king and hero, whom, alas! the sea
Hath overwhelmed, or whom the fatal lance
Of Priam's son hath slain. Old friend, be still.

TALTHYBIOS:

Alas for him, the youth, the rightful heir
To Pelops' ancient palace! Tricked, betrayed,
He pines away, a slave in foreign lands.
Beneath the lash of bondage he shall die
A shameful death, and never more behold
His kindred, friends, nor fatherland!

EURYBATES:

Alas!

TALTHYBIOS:

O Zeus, enthroned upon the silver peaks,
O thou whose watchful eyes are never closed,
Whose frowning brows are angry skies that hurl
Avenging thunders down on guilty heads,
Supreme, almighty Spirit, hear our prayer!
Remember thou the father; save the son!

[Enter the Watchman.]

Scene II.

THE SAME. THE WATCHMAN.

THE WATCHMAN:

He comes!
High flames the sacred pyre!
Wake, Argos! Shout! He comes! he comes! the King!

ORESTES

The Danaoi have leaped upon their prey
And Ilios the great has been crushed by the Gods!
Ho! bloodred glimmer of victorious day,
Rolling out of darkness from mount to mount,
Hail, flame! thou glory of black night;
How long beneath star-gemmed or clouded skies,
With straining sight I've sought thy lurid glare!
Land of my fathers! the males of thy breeding
Have sunk their iron teeth in Phrygian throats!
They have uprooted the walls, they have trampled down the towers!
There gleams the dawn!
How bright will glow the broader day of the home-coming of heroes!

TALTHYBIOS:

What, madman? Nay! a dream bewilders thee.
Our chieftain's ashes lie in foreign soil.
Of all the host he led, will none return.

EURYBATES:

Some shepherd's fire upon the sombre hill,
Or else the lightning-flash of Zeus, perchance,
Misled thee.

THE WATCHMAN:

Nay, I saw! I stood with open eyes.
Look ye! Behold how the last pyre upon the highest hill
Yet whirls through clouds of smoke a flame of gold,
The signal flashed from blazing Ilios!
I vouch that the host of the Achaians hath taken the City of Priam,
And that the Master, King of Men, hath triumphed!

Scene III.

THE SAME. CLYTAEMNESTRA.

CLYTAEMNESTRA:

[She enters, followed by her maids; she beckons the Watchman to retire, and he obeys.]
He spoke the truth, Elders. Rejoice with me!
The ruthless Gods unchained the wrath of the Hellenes;
The Argive hordes rolled over the bulwarks of Ilios!
Eleleu! I see them charge!
Pallas, Pallas, leads them on,
Spear in hand, hate in her eyes, insult on her lips,
And the red whirlwind storms the massive temples!
The palaces of Priam burst in flame and topple down.
A thousand crimson tongues lap the roofs of homes.
Surging mobs bellow in panic, and tumble in great heaps;
And mothers shriek with horror,
As the cradles are dashed from smoking roofs to the pavement
And the blood of children soaks the sandals of our warriors!
Ah, sweet is victory—and sweeter still is vengeance!

So thank the Gods for all their gifts, ye Elders.
 Stifle your fears; away with doubts.
 Though it may be that I, your queen, have doubted and feared,
 Though I have suffered,—
 Is it not by years of grief that we pay for rare moments of bliss?
 And what are years of longing and yearning,
 When joy comes and one is ready to grasp it!
 Yea; my spouse, my master, my King,
 The lord of strong-ribbed ships,
 Returns to the dark palaces of the sons of Tantalus;
 And, as is meet, I go to bid him welcome.

TALTHYBIOS:

O wife of him, our long-awaited chief,
 Queen Clytaemnestra, thou that bearest rule
 O'er sacred Argos dear to all the Gods,
 In truth we own thy words are very good,
 But hope is ever young,—and we are old.

EURYBATES:

Who knows the future save the jealous Gods?
 We know that oft an airy troop of dreams
 And visions fills with joy the silent night;
 But fear, O Queen, the dawn, the waking.

CLYTAEMNESTRA:

Am I a child, weeping and laughing in my sleep?
 I saw what your bleared eyeballs could not.
 So lift your solemn chants to the Immortals;
 For the red flame spoke true,
 And the brazen prows grate the pebbled shore.
 He comes! the sacred chief, the righteous king,
 To whom, for his virtues, Zeus hath granted safe return.
 But one, to me, shall never more return, O Elders,
 Her I shall not see alive—
 The tender victim of a ruthless sacrifice—
 My little daughter whose pure blood was shed at Aulis
 By wanton knives to purchase victory for Hellas.
 Yea, that perfect flower, the gift, I fondly deemed,
 Sent me by the Gods as a priceless token of their favor,
 That blossom reared under my loving eyes,
 She, whom in the exaltation of a boundless joy
 My lips and heart called Iphigenia,—
 Was roughly torn from me!
 Enough. 'Twas done. The Gods would have it so.
 It behooves us to forget bygone sorrows;
 For, praise the Gods! Ilios the great is sacked and burned!
 Our warriors are home!
 Throughout all Argos I will proclaim the glad news
 And will cause the dark blood of a hundred bellowing bulls
 To flow beneath the gracious heavens.

[Exit.]

Scene IV.

TALTHYBIOS. EURYBATES. CHORUS OF ELDERS.

TALTHYBIOS:

Mighty Gods,
Unseen avengers of nefarious deeds,
When all the hilltops leap with joyous flame,
When soon mine eyes shall see the king I love,
What nameless terror chills my quaking heart!

EURYBATES:

O ye before whose pillared altars bowed
Our fathers' fathers! Ye whose hands have brought
The lord of steeds, the joy of these old eyes,
Through many perils home in victory, —
To ye, alas, I dare not offer thanks;
A deathly hand is pressed upon my lips.

TALTHYBIOS:

Wan shades of bygone kings, unrestful ghosts
That bear upon your heads the grievous load
Of ancient error, wherefore gibber ye
In feeble wrath to ears that may not hear!
Vague faces, haunting faces of the dead
That lie unburned the prey of howling dogs,
O wistful spectres, wherefore do ye come?

EURYBATES:

And why dost thou pursue me, snow-white maid,
Once pride of Argos! Gently wast thou reared;
I saw thee grow in loveliness—to die
Upon accursèd altars!

TALTHYBIOS:

Come! Rejoice!
For Ilios, the strongly-walled abode
Of wickedness, lies conquered! Righteous Gods,
Your might hath battered in the gates of brass;
Your rage hath laid the towers low in dust;
Your vengeance drives toward Argos still the rout
Of panic-stricken fugitives who stray
Like homeless kine that lack a herdsman's care.
And still my heart is heavy. Fateful Gods
Who sit in patience weighing Right and Wrong,
Not all the ancient crimes are yet atoned!

EURYBATES:

I hear a murmur swelling like the tide.

TALTHYBIOS:

I hear it too. What means the volumned roar?

EURYBATES:

Long shouts of joy and victory, O Elders!
The tumbling roll of brazen chariots,
A mighty clash of shields;—the Master comes,
And all the city hails our king's return!

TALTHYBIOS:

And still I fear a curse, yet unfulfilled,
That lurks in darkness. O ye spirits veiled,
Remain within your bottomless abyss
Of dread! Forbear! Let great Atreides rule.
In peace and plenty. Spare his closing years!

Scene V.

THE SAME. CLYTAEMNESTRA, AGAMEMNON, CASSANDRA. WARRIORS,
SAILORS, CLYTAEMNESTRA'S MAIDS, CAPTIVES.

CLYTAEMNESTRA:

O King, cross the ancient threshold of thy father's house;
Enter, O Master, praised of gods and men,
Rich in glory, saved from the dark waves and storms,
From the thunder of Zeus and the Trojan spear.
Dear lord, whom my tears and prayers have ever followed,
Destroyer of Ilios, protector of the Achaians,
When, far from thy fatherland, O Chief, far from thy kin,
Thou drovest across the plain amid the clang of bucklers,
Pouring a furious whirlwind of warriors and horses
Against the massive walls of the city of Priam,
I, the lonely one, a prey to fear,
Wandering in gloom from hall to hall,
Listened, shuddering, to the whisperings of funereal phantoms.
Then this palace, full of terrors, seemed to echo a moan;
And straining through the night I thought mine eyes beheld
A royal shape, slow-pacing,—
Thy pallid ghost, my king, thy gory likeness.
I deemed thee dead. And what was left for me,
The mourning spouse of such a husband?
Therefore it is that thy son, the child I bore and suckled,
Lives far from Argos, safe from treacherous guile.
But soon shalt thou see him.
Past are the days and nights of horrid dreams that have wasted my
heart;
Now ends the waiting which seemed to be unending.
The man has come!
He has returned, the watchful guardian of the home,
More dear to me than is the cool stream to the parched wanderer.

Come, O Master, pride of Hellas and joy of my life,
Tread proudly under thy victorious foot
The purple pathway to the palace of thy fathers!

[Clytaemnestra's maids spread purple rugs before Agamemnon.]

AGAMEMNON:

I greet thee, Argos, radiant in sunshine.
Hail! temples, homes, men of my country!
Hail to ye, Zeus and Hermes, and to thee, Apollo, God of the swift
arrow.

Hail to the divine protectors of the Atrides
Who from sin and shame
Have shielded my home left so long ago.
Hail! ye Gods, who in the trap so patiently prepared
Have caught a witless nation;
Ye who still in the darkness of night
Fan the flames to roar in a hurricane through the ruins of Ilios!
But thy tongue, woman, spoke idle words;
For I shall not enter my home in state.
I seek not to be honored like a god,
Nor yet as a barbarian king, swollen with pride,
But as a man.

Too well I know that Envy, Goddess of the jealous eye,
Roams in the dark, spying upon our happiness and plotting against it.
It becomes a man to be moderate and self-controlled, O woman.

CLYTAEMNESTRA:

O Belovèd, consent; it is my heart's dearest wish.
Since the dreary days are done it is sweet to me
Thus to honor my lord and master,
The avenger of the Hellenes, the King of Men.
This purple is but homage due thee and pleases the Gods.

AGAMEMNON:

Listen, woman, keeping my eyes in thy heart. Obey.
The rough soil, the earth of my belovèd land,
Affords my foot a softer, safer path than purple cloth.
I, that unflinching have shouldered the crushing burden of the days
And the tasks the Gods laid upon me,
On my return seek naught but friendly hearts;
No flattering shouts, bowed heads nor smirking faces.

[Pointing to Cassandra.]

Behold this woman.
She is named Cassandra, last of all old Priam's daughters.
Mark how swift Fate under the victor's feet digs a dark abyss;
Who lifts his head too high is near his fall.
Wherefore, O daughter of Leda,
Since the Gods are gratified when a man is kind,
Be kind to the stranger.
Cheer her sorrow, soften her bondage.
This flower was bathed in the blood of heroes.

ORESTES

She grew on a royal tree that lost its blossoms, one by one.

Now I enter my home.

May the hearth have a smile and welcome for him who hath escaped

Alive from the spear of Ares, that harsh warrior.

Again receive me, Gods of Hearth and Home!

[He enters the house, followed by the warriors, the women and the captives.]

Scene VI.

CLYTAEMNESTRA, CASSANDRA, TALTHYBIOS, EURYBATES. CHORUS OF
ELDERS, CLYTAEMNESTRA'S MAIDS.

CLYTAEMNESTRA:

Cassandra, enter!

[Cassandra remains motionless.]

TALTHYBIOS:

Woman, dost thou hear?

EURYBATES:

Woman, the Queen hath called thee by thy name.

CLYTAEMNESTRA:

Unheeding and motionless,—

I have no time to wait for thee; slave, come!

The ewes are bleating, fettered near the pyre;

The bulls, adorned with sacred fillets,

Are bellowing and lolling their blue tongues;

The priests are mixing barley and salt, honey and purple wine.

The perfumes are burning and smoking,

And the sacred knife, unsheathed, is bright against the silver urn.—

This mad woman with eyes full of hatred

Is like a wild horse, tethered and panting.

Ho, daughter of Kings!

We shall forge to fit thy mouth a bit of ivory and gold,

Which thou in vain wilt champ and stain with bloody foam!

[Clytaemnestra enters the palace, followed by her maids. Cassandra still remains motionless.]

Scene VII.

TALTHYBIOS, EURYBATES, CASSANDRA. CHORUS OF ELDERS.

TALTHYBIOS:

Is not the tongue of Hellás known to thee?

CASSANDRA:

The cup is full, great Gods, my hour has come!

EURYBATES:

Unfortunate! Why dost thou rave and moan?

ORESTES

CASSANDRA:

Not murdered yet? O Gods! though still I hear
Relentless Hades call and call my name,
Why do I live!—Where am I?—Answer, thou!

TALTHYBIOS:

Before Atreides' hall.

CASSANDRA:

That cursed abode,
Abhorrent, vile to men and gods alike!
Apollo, my Belovèd! hast thou cast
Thy priestess down to such a reeking lair
Of blood?

EURYBATES:

She hath the bloodhound's scent, indeed!

TALTHYBIOS:

Mayhap the scent of blood that hath been shed,
Perchance the reek of murder yet to be
Hath touched her nostril.

CASSANDRA:

Fall! O house of hate,
And crumble into ruins!

EURYBATES:

Rein thy tongue!
Why cursest thou the palace of our king?

CASSANDRA:

Hold! I see a monstrous slaughter.
The brave is broken like a coward.
Hurry! take the bull away from the wild cow!
Ha! The thick net wraps him in its heavy folds!
She strikes! He rears! She strikes and strikes again!
Wrath spurts like flame from the vile female's eyes—
And the soul of the man hath departed from the body.

TALTHYBIOS:

What fearsome murder hath she thus foretold?

CASSANDRA:

Belovèd God, dear Master whom I served,
And hast thou dragged me hitherward to die?

EURYBATES:

A God,—which God?

CASSANDRA:

Apollo. He that bears
The golden bow, and hurts, yet loves me still.

TALTHYBIOS:

He loves thee, yet pursues thee still with wrath?

CASSANDRA:

I dared betray his love, to break my vows,
And loosed upon my soul unmeasured woe.
In vain I read the future; all my words
Were held as naught by men; my brothers scoffed,
Or, weary grown, they harshly bade me cease
My unavailing moan of coming ill.
But still in heavy darkness wandering,
I heard the distant moan of towering tides
Of grief; I saw the deep, engulfing waves
Of sorrow ever rising. Still the God
Mocked at my misery. He filled my nights
With frightful visions, hideous but true;
And still he blinded every eye but mine;
And still he sealed the ears of all my kin;
And still I prophesied,—and none would hear!

O hoary heads of them that nurtured me!
O ancient fortress, palaces and towers!
My native shores where sang the bitter sea;
O streams, brotherly streams, of kindly gods,—
Skamandros, Simois, dear to Priam's sons,
Whose cooling waters quenched at noon the drought
Of wandering kine, whose soft, caressing flow
At twilight cradled rosy, laughing maids,—
Ye streams that now between your flooded banks
Are rolling bucklers, chariots, ghastly heaps
Of naked men still gripping broken swords,
Disheveled, soiled with scum, and empty-eyed;—
O hills and valleys; O my Ilios,
My fettered country!—Ye I could not save,
And would not save my worthless self. Farewell!
A gale of death impels me, to and fro,
To prophesy in darkness. Even now
The Living doubt me;—will the Dead believe?
I will go forth, Apollo, bearing still
Thy sacred wand, thy mystic garland bound
About my pallid brow, to chant of thee
To all the charmed throng. The hour is come.
The ax I see. Beside the altar stands
The sacrifice. My soul shall soon depart,
Enkindled by a God's forgiving kiss.

EURYBATES:

That here dark deeds were done hath long been known;
In this thou spakest truth; for many kings
Have wet these fated walls with blood and tears.
But men are wiser grown; such red mischance
Will not again befall.

TALTHYBIOS:

Rest, void of fear
Beside the Master's hearth. Thy father dead,
Thy city laid in dust, thy free neck bent
Beneath the insulting yoke,—'tis Destiny.
The breed of man is born for misery;
The jealous Gods alone would dwell in glee.
But still remember, woman, though enslaved,
Thy life is sacred; thou hast naught to fear.

CASSANDRA:

Ye fools!—ye who even now are doubting my prophesy,
Hark! the distant clamor swells.
Oh, the slow howls, far away!
I see them running thither,
Running on the scent of those about to die.
Alas! I know them well,
The monsters who revel in the groans of the dying,
The old witches with their hollow eyes,
The pale Erinyes,
Who sniffed in the night the path we followed!
Come! lugubrious and loathsome pack!
Howling relentlessly, and licking the yet foul track of ancient Wrong!
Come! come!
He falls under the ax and shrieks with his last gasp—
The King of Men! the warrior brave and victorious
Beneath whose onslaught fell thy bulwarks, high-walled Ilios!
O my people, O my father, O my brothers,
Behold and rejoice! your woes are avenged!
The divine chief, the destroyer of cities,
Hath been snared by a smiling face, by low wiles,
By the tongue that flattered, by the furtive eye that lured,
By the soft hand which caressed—and smote him dead in his bath!

EURYBATES:

Unfortunate, be still! Thy words are mad!

TALTHYBIOS:

Weigh well thy prophesies, ill-omened seer,
Or use thy fist to cram that boding mouth!

CASSANDRA:

Peace, peace, poor Elders, heed me not. And thou,
Archer divine, whose bright, all-seeing eye
Within my own is mirrored, take again
Thy sceptre-wand and double wreath of bay!

[She throws away her sceptre and tears off her fillet.]

I feel a breeze of death; beneath the knife,
The biting knife, my flesh will shudder, soon.
On Hades' plain where grows the asphodel
The shadows of my fathers stand prepared
To welcome me.

Yet shall I be avenged.

He will return; the Fates will bring back him
Who drank of Clytaemnestra's poisoned milk—
The errant youth whose daily food is hate,
That monstrous offspring of a bloody race,
To be his mother's murderer, self-loathed,
The prey of all the wraths of all the Gods.
Now let them bind me, and may one swift thrust
Conclude my days and give me sleep at last!

[She goes toward the palace, but shrinks back.]

Ah! What a horrid vision! Oh, to see
The knife-blade glimmer at my throat, to feel
The warm blood streaming forth to drain these veins
And leave this body cold! I am afraid.
I dare not enter, Elders. Purple mists
Becloud mine eyes, and chill dews wet my face.

EURYBATES:

If this be true, unhappy, enter not,
But flee from Argos. We will hold our peace.

CASSANDRA:

I cannot. I must enter. That foul dog
Beside her murdered lord must lay me low.
That pride is mine which cowards may not know,
To brave the death I dread.

O house of gloom

Most deadly to thy dwellers, sombre den
Where, as the father slew, the son will slay,—
Ery of vultures gorged but hungry still,
By every ill I curse thy hated walls!—
By broken oaths and violated faith,
By impious feasts, by vengeance hideous,
By lurking Treason's ever-wakeful eyes,
By this sad land where wallow bestial men,
By Hell's black night, the moan of brooding storms
O'er wailing seas,—by Ilios aflame,
By all the griefs my tortured people bore,—
Be thou accurst and ever more accurst!

[She enters the palace.]

Scene VIII.

THE SAME. CHORUS OF ELDERS.

TALTHYBIOS:

May Zeus belie her bitter words!

EURYBATES:

Alas,

How purblind men, poor creatures of a day,
Must follow, follow, stumbling through the dark,
The glimmer of one hour free of woe!

ORESTES

TALTHYBIOS:

What man may boast himself as fortunate!
The dead alone are happy.

EURYBATES:

Like the tide,
The flood of seeming pleasure ebbs and wanes.

TALTHYBIOS:

Man may not clasp in heavy hands of clay
The flitting butterfly of earthly bliss.

EURYBATES:

He can but hope for strength to bear the flood
That none may stem—the rush of doleful days.

AGAMEMNON:

[Within the palace.]

Help! I am slain! Treason! Help!

TALTHYBIOS:

Oh, dreadful cry!

AGAMEMNON:

Woman, stop—I am dying.

EURYBATES:

It is the son of Atreus. Grisly fear
Unnerves my limbs. But haste! They kill the King!

TALTHYBIOS:

What can we do, dear Elders, all unarmed
And weak with age, where strength itself were vain?
For not the strongest arm nor bravest blade
Can give back life to him that is no more.

EURYBATES:

Dark Prophetess, thy curse begins to fall!

Scene IX.

THE SAME. CLYTAEMNESTRA.

CLYTAEMNESTRA:

[Her gown is stained with blood; she is wielding an ax.]

I struck! I slew! The deed is done!
Long have I dreamed of this hour!
How slowly crept the days of my dream;
But now I am awake!
What joy was mine to feel my prey writhe and pant,
Trapped in the gorgeous net these fingers wove!
Not even the Gods may know with what unbounded hate, still unap-
peased,

ORESTES

I loathed that man, the black stain of my life.
Three times I struck him, lowing like a bull;
Three times the hot stream of his blood
Gushed upon me like dew, unutterably sweet,
More grateful to me than is the cool rain of Zeus to the parched earth
in summer.

TALTHYBIOS:

I marvel at thy boldness, dazed, appalled!

CLYTAEMNESTRA:

Praise me or blame me, it matters not, O Elders.
Right well I struck. The beast is dead.

EURYBATES:

O woman, what rank fumes of nether Hell,
What cursed fruit of bleak and arid soil
Cankered thy blood? What madness prompted thee
To slay our king, thy husband, with thy hands?
What crime of thine against the Gods, hath moved
The Gods to let thee sound the depths of crime?

CLYTAEMNESTRA:

My hands have done a deed. The deed was good.
I glory in it.

TALTHYBIOS:

Ah, she-wolf! when thy dreadful deed is known,
The crime thou vauntest, filled with righteous rage
Thy people, hurling stones, will drive thee forth
From sacred Argos. Thou shalt wander far
Through many lands, the scorn of men in all,
A beast unclean, unresting, howling, scourged,
And never day or night shall lend thee peace.
Thy very path will shrink with shame to bear
The loathed impress of thy flying feet.

CLYTAEMNESTRA:

And what of him,—true heir of crime-stained fathers?
What of that man, more heartless than a wolf,
Who drenched the sands of Aulis with the blood of my daughter;—
My daughter, whom I bore; my daughter, whom I loved,
Who was my joy, my pride,
Who was the dawn of my heart, now dark forever!
Bound upon the altar, she cried to her absent mother,
While the implacable slayer offered her throbbing heart to the dis-
mayed Gods.

What of that man?

His people did not drive him from the soil;
The stones upon his pathway have not cursed him;
But should my hands have spared him?—No!
Should he have lived to the end of a victorious reign,
Burdened with honor, rich in spoil,

ORESTES

Happy, and worshipped by all the Hellenes,
A living insult to the tears that dimmed my eyes?—
And now, shall this earth under the deep heavens
Give him the soft grave of a righteous king?
Shall any gilded tomb shelter his august ashes?
No!—Let none compose that carrion upon the lofty pyre!
No funeral purple, no libations, no pious tears for him!
Throw those two bodies to the wild beasts,
A prey to the eagles winging from the distant peaks,
Or to the ravening dogs.
Such is my pleasure.
Let none divorce the Tamer of Ilios and his barbarian woman,—
The Prophetess and her royal lover.
Let the base mire be their bridal bed!

EURYBATES:

And didst thou slay her, too?

CLYTAEMNESTRA:

And did I not?

I mowed the ripe sheaf and the weed
As I would mow his boon companions,—all that saw and blest his crime,
Were they not dead.
And think not, Elders, that I weigh at all
The rage or panic of the witless mob.
Go forth and say to all the people
That I have placed the sceptre in strong hands—
The hands of brave Aegisthos, whom I love.

TALTHYBIOS:

Zeus Father! Shall we live beneath the yoke
Of such adultery? O woman, how
Hath holy Argos earned a shame like this!

EURYBATES:

Wait, wait. The youth, though sold in slavery,
The son whose father died a noble king,
Although his mother reeks with sacrilege
Unspeakable,—Orestes lives.

CLYTAEMNESTRA:

Then let him live and atone
For the shame of being born from the odious blood of Agamemnon!
But let him live far from my eyes,
Without a country and without a name.
Though exile may be bitter, death is worse.

TALTHYBIOS:

High Gods! And couldst thou even kill thy son?

CLYTAEMNESTRA:

Did not his father kill my daughter? I hate him.
I hate all he loved in life, that king, that man, that ghost,—

ORESTES

Hellas or Argos, or the tongue that speaks his name,
The sun that shone upon him and the air he breathed,
The walls his execrated body touched,
The stones he trod upon,
The swords he wrenched from the hands of fallen heroes,
The wealth he conquered under burning towers,
And all the issue of his blood and mine!

EURYBATES:

Come! Let us wake the town! The King is slain!
Arise, ye Argives!

TALTHYBIOS:

Haste with ax and sword,
With bow and boarspear, knife and javelin!
Up! up! and drag the tyrant by the heels
From Pelops' royal home!

EURYBATES:

Arise! arise!
Ho, men of Argos! Storm the fatal hall!
With furious deeds avenge your slaughtered king
And wash with blood the taint of blood away!

CLYTAEMNESTRA:

Stay, Elders. All is done that should be done.
In every home rule Terror and Dismay.
Aegisthos, with the glimmer of his spear,
On each man's lips hath nailed the daring words.
Be silent, too, or, by that chastised one
Who lieth there, and by the nether Gods,
The ruthless sword shall drain your old veins dry!—
For all your hoary beards and idle tears,
By Styx I swear, O Elders, ye shall die!

TALTHYBIOS:

Queen Clytaemnestra, bold thou art and strong—
Too strong. We leave due vengeance to the Gods.

EURYBATES:

And when their red bolt falls, as fall it will
Upon thy head, O woman,—when at length
Comes retribution equal to thy deed,
Remember thou this hour!

CLYTAEMNESTRA:

Be it so.
The deed is mine, I bide the consequence.
Dismiss your cares and boding dreams; begone.
[Exeunt the Elders.]

Scene X.

CLYTAEMNESTRA [ALONE]:

I love, I rule; my daughter is avenged;
Now let the heavens roar from East to West!
With head erect, and clear, defiant brow,
I brave your thunders, O Eternal Gods!

ORESTES

PART II

PART II: ORESTES

ARGOS, EIGHT YEARS LATER. ON THE LEFT, THE PALACE OF PELOPS. ON THE RIGHT, TREES AND BOWLDERS. IN THE MIDDLE BACKGROUND THE MOUND OF THE GRAVE OF AGAMEMNON, AND BEYOND THE PLAIN OF ARGOS. THE CHOEPHORI, BEARING LIBATION CUPS AND FUNERAL GARLANDS, FILE OUT OF THE PALACE AND GROUP THEMSELVES IN TWO SEMI-CHORUSES TO THE RIGHT AND LEFT OF THE MOUND.

Scene I.

CALLIRHOE, ISMENA. CHORUS OF CHOEPHORI.

CALLIRHOE:

Upon this grave, revered by all the tribes
Of Hellas, mournful sisters, let us lay
Beside the votive cups of hallowed wine
Our wistful blossoms, tribute dear to those
That are no more.

[They lay down the cups and garlands.]

And now the rites demand

That sweet Electra, sprung of royal blood,
With cypress wreathed and bay, shall duly pour
A full libation unto him that dwells
A sceptred shade in Hades.

Thus the Queen,
The heartless, impious Queen, at last o'erwhelmed
With black remorse, hath ordered. For, 'tis said,
Unholy visions rise to haunt her sleep—
That every night her husband's gory face
Dwells in her eyeballs,—yea, that oftentimes
Half-smothered groans and doleful sobs are heard
In Pelops' hall.

ISMENA:

May Hades hear them, too!

So may she die.

CALLIRHOE:

What guilty pangs must tear

That tortured soul! For, though the teeth of flame
Devour murdered flesh, the spirit still
Will rise unconquered, seeking, day and night,
Unfailing retribution.

ISMENA:

Mother Earth,
Aghast to feel her children's blood, forbids
Her streams and all her circling seas to cleanse
That hand which did a murder. Like a wolf
Caught in a pitfall, trembling lies the Queen
In fear of what must come; for those that read
Dark portents, say that near and nearer treads
Her day of reckoning. Her doom is sure.

ORESTES

CALLIRHOE:

But we, poor slaves, from whom the angry Gods
Have taken all but tears, condemned to share
The fate of hapless masters, must forget
Our woes to wail the woes of those we serve.

ISMENA:

The pack, with green-lit eyes, yet growls and fights
Above the noble quarry, dead, but warm.
Our homes, our fanes, our fathers bent with years,
Our brothers, husbands, children, yet shall be
Avenged full tale! In dust and ashes lies
Our Ilios, by Hellas overcome.—
Of that ill victory may Hellas die!

CALLIRHOE:

Dear sister, let the righteous Destinies
Exact all retribution. Deep enough
Are mortal woes, too deep for us to add
One grief the more through any lust of wrath,
For love and kindness best befit a slave.

ISMENA:

We love divine Electra who loves us.
Unstained with any crime, her snow-white hands
Have ever toiled to make our burdens less.
She comes. Upon her break the rosy dawns
Of happier days!

[Enter Electra.]

Scene II.

THE SAME. ELECTRA.

ELECTRA:

O palace-women, ye
Whose gentle care made safe my youthful years,
Advise me now before this mound that holds
My father's dust. What message may I speak
To soothe his angry shade?—that she, his wife,
His murderess hath sent me? O ye Gods!
Or shall I, standing with averted eyes,
Thrice pour libation silently, and flee
The place of sorrow? Gentle sisters, friends,
I come distracted; pray ye, counsel me!

CALLIRHOE:

Approach the grave, white maid, as though it were
A sacred altar; pouring purple wine
Beseech the murdered Chieftain's ghost to keep
Thy brother's life, to break his weary bonds,
To guard his son, Orestes, safe from harm.

ORESTES

ISMENA:

Electra, dear to me for many deeds
Of kindness, lift thy virgin hands and pray
Thy father, overcome by hate and guile,
To speed the day of justice; home at last
To lead the child of fate, the youth divine,
A fearful, guilty mother's blameless son.

CALLIRHOE:

Pray, sweet Electra! To thy father raise
A plea for those he loved in mortal life.
The Gods will hear thy desolate appeal.

ELECTRA:

[She takes a cup and goes to the tomb.]

Fleet Hermes, light-winged messenger, who, at one stroke
Canst soar from those dark meads where blows the asphodel
To that high path of gold the blest Olympians tread,
God, first to thee I pour the krater's unmixed wine!

[She pours the first libation.]

Almighty, silent Gods that rule eternal space,
O Pluto terrible, enthroned in mystic night,
And thou, Persephone that makest flowers bloom,
Permit the kingly son of Atreus, wandering
In Hades' gloomy realm, to raise his royal head
And hear the mournful prayer of her, the child he loved!

[She pours the second libation.]

And now, dear father, hear thy helpless daughter's voice!
Uplift thy brooding eyes from deep, abysmal shade!
Oppressed, I live in tears; thy son is held in thrall;
A craven wretch that dared not face thee, rules thy home,
Usurps thy bed, thy crown, the wealth thy valor won.
O King revered, give ear! O father, heed my prayer!
Return! for she that slew thee, vaunting in her crime,
Contemns thy royal blood and leaves us bare and poor.
Dear phantom, aid thy race; spare not the wicked pair;
Arise! and send the swift avenger, long decreed!

[She pours the third libation. Orestes rises from behind the rocks.]

Scene III.

THE SAME. ORESTES.

ORESTES:

The Gods have heard thy prayer, bright maid.
The clouds brighten; the dawn already glimmers.
One more wild gust,—and then the sea will calm.

ELECTRA:

Stranger, what seekest thou?

ORESTES:

Orestes lives. He comes. He is near.

ORESTES

Fear not that he will flinch or that his heart will waver!
He will at once avenge his father and his sister.

ELECTRA:

O words of goodly omen, full of cheer!
Orestes lives?

ORESTES:

He lives, I warrant thee.

ELECTRA:

Gods, hide him from the eyes of that fell pair!
Stranger, why hast thou spoken thus to me?
And was it truth? My heart is beating fast,
Mine eye grows dim. Deceive me not, I pray!
And hast thou followed him, the last bright hope
Of Pelops' race, Orestes? Can it be
He breathes? My face grows hot with tears of joy.
Let me but see him, greet him once, kind Gods,
And, greeting, die in his belovèd arms!

ORESTES:

Electra,—dear one, hear! I am thy brother!
Let no doubt, no tremor move thy heart.
Canst thou not see? I am thy brother!
By all the Gods I swear!
Believe the tears of joy that fill mine eyes,
The voice that speaks in thine own heart!
I am thy blood, thy care, thy hope,
Thy brother,—he that loves thee!
Bear witness, Gods above! and you, O sepulchre, most holy altar!
Old abode of my fathers,
Massive rocks, bowers that sheltered me with shade,
Soil of my native land, thrice blessèd soil,—
Speak ye! Bear witness that I speak the truth!
Orestes lives! I am that man!

ELECTRA:

Thou art my brother, dearest heart of hearts,
I know, for all my being yearns to thee!
Dream of my nights and longing of my days,
In spite of drear forebodings hoped for still,
Indeed I own thee. Now my spirit feels
New thirst for life. O friend, so long desired,
Thou spakest truth: The dawn already gleams;
My griefs are gone; for thou wilt be to me
At once our royal father, now no more,
Our sister whom the Gods forsook, and she,
That mother who hath learned to loathe us. Come!
Console me for the loss of all I loved;
O brother, be thou faithful unto me!

ORESTES:

No force can break the bond of love that binds us.
Pray Hades gulf me should I e'er forsake thee!

ELECTRA:

But say, what drove thee, God or oracle,
From exile hitherward where danger dwells?
Dost thou know all? A coward tyrannous,
Joined with a traitor queen feasts on our woes.
Our father's wealth, our people, sore oppressed.
Aegisthos rules. Take heed, O brother dear.
And hast thou heard of all the sombre file
Of hooded Destinies?—of that dark crime
By which our father died when home he came
Victorious from those ten years of war
That wasted Ilios?—and of his Queen,
That blood-stained woman, and her shameless love?

ORESTES:

I have lived in bondage,
Bending my proud neck beneath the yoke of a hard master;
But ever my misery was haunted by memories of the past—
By visions of a proud-eyed father, tall and calm and like a god;
An ever-smiling throng eager to do my pleasure;
Warriors, maids; an altar; and a lofty home where many kings had
dwelt;
And children's games; and mornings, noons and sunsets;
Then, darkness; and a chariot that carried me afar;
Then insult, blows, the garb of slavery,
The food of beasts, the water of the gutter.
But still the dream lingered in my tameless heart
That I was born of blood that would be free!
And as I grew I heard of grand, heroic deeds;
Of splendid battles and of kings who braved uncounted dangers;
Of Ilios ablaze in the darkness of nights;
Of the glorious home-coming; of the wanton crime;
Of the name of my father and of her who bore me.
Oh, what a torrent of strength rushed through my veins!
I shook off the yoke; I burst my chains;
I yelled my fierce joy to the deep heavens;
I ran, I leaped, I bounded toward sacred Argos!

ELECTRA:

O fearless son of yon dead hero, fear
The heartless mother, now inflamed with wrath
Against her offspring. Neither tears nor prayers
Nor these embracing arms could guard thy life
Against her hate. As soon as thou art known,
O brother, thou wilt die.

ORESTES:

Be comforted.

The God who sent me here

Will lend me wit to blind those beasts of prey.
I will ensnare him in a net of wiles
Despite the craft his cowardice hath taught.
Zeus be my aid! I surely shall not fail
To slay him as they slaughter other swine
No filthier than he!
As for my mother—may the righteous Gods direct me!
Since the hour has come,—quick action!
I thirst for blood! Fate goads me on!
Women, let one of ye haste to the Queen.
Say to her, "A traveler unknown to us, O daughter of Leda,
"Hath come to Argos, bringing tidings that—
"May Zeus belie his words!—
"Orestes lies upon the funeral couch."
She will come, happy.

[To Electra.]

And thou, sister, show sorrow.
Accuse the adverse Fates.
Pour out thy soul in bitter wails
For brother, father, all our waning race.
Moan. Lift thy arms to the sky.
Weep. Let the Gods act.

[One of the women enters the palace. Orestes, lifting a cup, advances toward the grave.]

Father, father in thy grave soaked with tears, hear me!
Not by sword or javelin, Warrior, wast thou slain,
A man among men, dying the death of heroes,
Proud of brow, calm of heart.
No glorious pyre of elm or fragrant pine
Consumed thy venerated flesh and bones;
Nor do thy kingly ashes lie within
A giant mound beside the ever-moaning sea.
Like a stunned bull, helpless, bound by the horns,
Bleeding at the mouth and rolling glassy eyes,
The King of Men died, slaughtered cowardwise.
Father, be consoled. Thy vengeance comes.

[He pours a libation.]

CALLIRHOE:

Like snow upon the lofty mountain peaks,
Forever pure and bright, is Clemency
Upon the brow of Wisdom. Keep it pure;
For any blot of blood defiles that snow
Forever. Swiftly, surely spreads the stain,
Gnawing the crust, till what was once so fair
Is sunk to loathsome mud. Then, irate youth,
Be warned, and let the Gods give punishments.

ISMENA:

Not so. The seedling Future hath its root
Deep in the moldered Past. A stern decree
Compels our perverse race—that ever blood
Must wash away the blood of ancient crimes,
Though each new slayer still in turn be slain

And each new crime beget a fouler crime.
Naught care the Gods for Clemency. O friend,
Avenge thy father. That alone is just.

ELECTRA:

I feel the pangs of doubt unknown before.
O father, from thy grave inspire us!

ORESTES:

The righteous Gods have weighed them in their scales.
What must be, shall be.

[Clytaemnestra appears in the portico. Orestes sees her.]

But,—silence! Someone is coming.
Tell me, sister, that woman gliding from the palace,
Queenly, tall and pale, like unto Death,
Who is she? Name her name.
O dearest, answer me; my heart is quivering.

ELECTRA:

Thy mother!

Scene IV.

THE SAME. CLYTAEMNESTRA.

CLYTAEMNESTRA:

[To Electra.]

Is this the man?

ELECTRA:

This is the man.

CLYTAEMNESTRA:

Indeed, I have seen such eyes in my dreams.
This man hath a clouded brow.—
It is some wandering beggar full of shame or dread.
Come nearer, stranger.
It is said thou bringest news of death. Is it true?
I am Clytaemnestra. Speak. I listen.

ORESTES:

Noble woman, a thankless task it is and an unwise
To bring a gloomy message suddenly.
It is an ill response to kindly welcome
To speak of death at the gate of the home;
Yet, though the news be sad,
It is too weighty to be kept a secret.

CLYTAEMNESTRA:

Cautious thou art; but comfort thy mind.
From someone, some day, should we hear thy news.
Our hospitality shall guard thee whatever word thou bearest.

ORESTES:

Queen, I walked along a rugged mountain path
In Phocis, near to Daulis.

At eventide I halted by the way.
A man of many years, an elmwood staff in hand,
Sat down beside me and we spoke together.
I told him whither I was bound.
Said he, "The Gods have favored me to send thee here,
"For I have news which thou shalt bear to Argos.
"Men call me Strophios of Daulis.
"Keep thou my name in mind, lest any doubt thy tidings.
"Tell the Queen that young Orestes lives no more.
"His ashes rest within a brazen urn.
"Ask then his high-born, well-belovèd mother
"If I shall send the urn of sepulchre to Argos,
"Or keep it here.
"Whate'er she wills, that shall I do."
Great Queen, thus spake the white-haired man. Naught else I know.
To-morrow, at the break of day, I hasten back to Daulis;
What word of thine goes with me—
Shall he send the funeral urn?

CLYTAEMNESTRA:

No! Bid him bury it.

ELECTRA:

O miserable brood to suffering doomed!
My brother! Our last hope!

CLYTAEMNESTRA:

Bootless thy tears, fruitless thy moans.
No wail ever yet woke the dead.

ELECTRA:

The Gods have overwhelmed in one great storm
The father, rich in glory, and the son,
Rich but in woe. My brother, thou art gone!
Our race is done.

CLYTAEMNESTRA:

Whine over them no more,
Lest thou find cause to shed tears for thyself!

ELECTRA:

Above our doomed heads, hovering like a cloud,
Goddess of Hatred, say! is this dread bolt
Thy last?

CLYTAEMNESTRA:

No, not the last—unless thou heedest me!

ELECTRA:

O exiled brother, thy sad ashes, too
Are exiled. O'er the poor, ignoble urn
That holds thy dust I may not pour my tears!

CLYTAEMNESTRA:

Thou wilt be wise to ponder my commands!
Follow me to the palace, stranger.
Thy message must be given to the Master
By no instructed lips, but thine alone.

[To Electra and the Choephoroi.]

Upon this grave now pour the ritual wine;
With sacred chants appease the angry shade;—
And give my nights again the balm of sleep
These eyes no longer know.

[She enters the palace, followed by Orestes.]

Scene V.

ELECTRA, CALLIRHOE, ISMENA. CHORUS OF CHOEPHORI.

CALLIRHOE:

The woman did not know her banished son.

ISMENA:

Some God who loves him, doubtless, veils her sight.
She thinks, with joy, that wakeful nights no more
Will half betray vague terrors in the dark.
She thinks to look again with fearless eyes
Upon the whitening dawn, the set of day.
She thinks him dead; his stratagem is sure.

ELECTRA:

Alas, to live in pain, despair and hate
Where gloomy nights give place to gloomier days
And hard and rugged pathways lead to graves!
What have we done, O Zeus, to earn such woe?
What guilt was mine? And thou, Orestes dear,
What fault was thine? Our fathers' fathers sinned,
But did their children sin? If Innocence
Must pay the debts of Guilt, almighty Zeus,
Where lies thy justice?

CALLIRHOE:

Agamemnon's child,
Thou speakest truth; but say, what guilt was ours
In sacred Ilios, when o'er the waves
That bright blades beat to foam in rapid flight,
The faithless Helen followed Priam's son?
Yet, blameless mother, father, tender babe,—
All, all our race atoned the crime of one.

ELECTRA:

Your woes are very great, and undeserved.

ISMENA:

Hear ye our prayers, O Gods, heed ye our tears!
Within this home, to us a kindly home,
Protect these guiltless children!

ORESTES

ELECTRA:

Mighty Gods
That balance Right and Wrong, in justice give
The righteous heir his lawful heritage!

CALLIRHOE:

The Master whom we loved hath passed away.
Preserve his son!

ELECTRA:

He stands against a host,
Unknown, unarmed, alone!

ISMENA:

Nay, not alone;
For when he strode within that sombre lair
The shadow of his father entered, too.

ELECTRA:

O King of Men, O crowned and sceptred shade
Of great Atreides, rise! the hour is come.
In righteous fray direct thy gallant son;
Dwell in his heart, make strong his youthful arm,
And bid him take full vengeance, sparing not
The knave that hath usurped thy home and throne,—
The wretch impure whose foulness would defile
The flaming thunderbolt of wrathful Zeus—

CALLIRHOE:

Thy mother, child—

ELECTRA:

What canst thou say for her?

ISMENA:

I say, in Hades dwells a frowning judge!

[Shouts are heard from the palace. An attendant rushes out and across the stage.]

Scene VI.

THE SAME. AN ATTENDANT.

THE ATTENDANT:

Murder! The Master is slain! Haste hither!
Guard the Queen! Bar the gates! Alas, too late.
The son of Thyestes is dead! Murder! Help!

[Exit to the right.]

Scene VII.

ELECTRA, CALLIRHOE, ISMENA. CHORUS OF CHOEPHORI.

CALLIRHOE:

The blameless youth hath slain the guilty man.

ORESTES

ISMENA:

Strike hard, young hero, strike! Spare none! Spare none!

ELECTRA:

O Zeus, preserve my brother! Should he fall,
My day of death is come.

CALLIRHOE:

Zeus be his guide!

ISMENA:

And let him falter not, but end the work!
For if he stays the sword, his death is sure.

[More shouts from within.]

ELECTRA:

The clamor rises higher still.

CALLIRHOE:

I hear

Loud cries of grief, and lamentations wild.

ISMENA:

The broken-hearted mistress, Queen no more,
Bewails in long-drawn moans her lover's death.

[Clytaemnestra, pale and shuddering, appears under the portico.]

ELECTRA:

Ye Gods! my mother!

CALLIRHOE:

Fear dilates her eyes.

ISMENA:

She sees the march of dark, eternal hours,
And visioned Death hath made her pupils glare.

[Electra and the Choephoroi flee.]

Scene VIII.

CLYTAEMNESTRA, ALONE.

CLYTAEMNESTRA:

[She moves forward with uncertain steps as though bewildered.]

Appalled, I fled.

Who is this beggar that slays kings?

I cannot guess. A cold sweat bathes my brow.

The dreadful boldness of that wretch hath stunned me.

I entered. He followed.

"Behold the King of Argos!" thus I spoke.

The son of Thyestes, seeing him at the door in humble obeisance,

Greeted him kindly.

"Stranger," said he, "fear not; our home gods will protect thee;

"For thou crossest our threshold under happy auspices."

The man drew near and told the chief his tale;

But, suddenly advancing, with a bound
He drove a long knife deep into the Master's throat.
I shrieked. A servant came, then, howling, fled.
And still that wild man smote and smote the King.
I ran, covering my eyes with my hands.
Why did I fly? What panic held be dumb?

[She turns back to the portico, shouting.]

Men! Guards! Help! Seize, bind, kill the stranger!
Slay the bloodthirsty beggar!

[Orestes appears in the portico, knife in hand.]

Scene IX.

CLYTAEMNESTRA AND ORESTES.

ORESTES:

No word, no whisper! At last I have caught thee!
Thy hour has come. Now will I speak to thee.

CLYTAEMNESTRA:

Infamous vagrant, what wilt thou have?
Who art thou, coward? How had we harmed thee?

ORESTES:

Clench not thy fist;
Clench thy teeth on thy tongue, woman,
But open wide thine ears and I will tell thee all.
Thou askest who I am?
Thou knowest not because thou feelest nothing;
Thy heart, as ever, is of flint.
I am thy son.

CLYTAEMNESTRA:

My son is dead. Rail not so cruelly.

ORESTES:

Nay. Thou didst bear me in thy bosom.
Behold thy son!
Such as the Gods and thou didst make him, such he is.
I sucked thy milk, I slept upon thy breast, I called thee mother.
Oh, once loved thought of days of fleeting joy
When thou didst smile to name me by my name!

CLYTAEMNESTRA:

Can this be truth? O Gods!

ORESTES:

Come no nearer;
Or I shall slay thee without delay.
Hear thy son, O stainless and loving mother!
Hating the heroic blood from which I sprung,
Thou hadst the heart to take from me my all,—
My name, my throne, my wealth,
The very freedom that is life itself.

To serve thy shameful ends thy son was sold, a slave,
 And thrown out of the royal cradle, very far;
 Deep in the mud to wallow with the swine.
 I staggered under blows, I sweated under insult,
 I watered kindly earth with tears of rage,
 I cursed the light of day, the shade of night
 And the deaf Gods in heaven.
 And I have aged a hundred years
 Though I have lived so few.
 No matter, these are trifles;
 My tears, my shame, thy hatred,
 All the ills that heart of thine, once tender, now so hard,
 Could heap upon me,—
 I forgive thee all; all these I can forget;
 No wrongs of mine would make me lift a hand against thy life.
 But for a darker crime thou must atone.
 Thy span of years is ended. Thou must die.

CLYTAEMNESTRA:

Thou canst not kill thy mother!

ORESTES:

My mother? Thou art no longer "Mother"!
 My mother is a pallid, frightened shade
 That chargeth thee with treason toward
 Her husband, son and home.
 Thy name is wile and cunning, foul adultery and murder.
 Thou must die.
 A God, a God is beckoning above,
 And from the black abyss of Hades my father glares on me,
 Indignant that my vengeance waits so long.
 Yet, ere thou fallest, bloody from my blow,
 Speak! appease the pale King, slaughtered in his bath!
 Upon the barren sands where rolls the river of darkness
 He lies, and waits in wrath his loathsome widow!

CLYTAEMNESTRA:

My son, my son, spare her that suckled thee!

ORESTES:

Not to thy son,—speak to thy husband, woman.
 I smite thee, but he sentenced thee.

CLYTAEMNESTRA:

Not I—not I! The deed was not my own!
 It was the fierce Erinyes, ever fell against thy race,
 Those harpies ruthless, pitiless,
 Through whom thy father died under the brazen ax.
 They moved my heart, so long austere, to wickedness.
 They wrought it all, my child.
 And see!—my crime was bootless.
 Day and night my heart hath bled.

ORESTES

O walls that know my nights of sleepless dread,
And thou, whose ever-haunting eyes have made mine own grow hollow,
Shade of the hero, ghost of the husband, speak!
My child, my child! See, I embrace thy knees.
Shed not my blood!

ORESTES:

Hast thou said all?

CLYTAEMNESTRA:

Woe to thee if thou heedest not my prayer!
Fear to hear the yelp of the ever-hungry pack,
The infernal Erinyes!
My son, beloved, wait!
Thou canst not wish to see me die;
Let me grow old within this ancient house!

ORESTES:

Thou,—thou to live?—and here!
What would the Gods say?
What would the people say—
Our servants; those before us, those to come?
Nay, thou shalt die and meet thy destiny.
Come! come within and I will lay thee by thy guilty partner
Who like a cur lies huddled in his own foul blood;
To-morrow, as before, his couch shall still be thine.
Yea, since the man was dear to thee, thou shalt not leave him.
Haste, woman! haste within, lest I be moved
To drag thee thither by the hair!

CLYTAEMNESTRA:

O Gods! Electra!—my daughter!
Forgive, my son, forgive!

ORESTES:

I shall be deaf and blind.

CLYTAEMNESTRA:

O monster! O merciless race! I see that naught can move thee!
Thy heart is hard as yonder rocks.
My prayers are at an end; be satisfied.
Wretch, I devote thee to the bleared Erinyes—
The dogs of Hell that shall avenge thy mother.
To thee I leave my own black tortures.
Thou shalt lie aghast at night
And drink, in awful dreams, thy own hot blood.
From dawn to sunset shalt thou hear my dying gasps
And flee like a coward,
Hated, hounded, cursed and miserable.
Hold! I shall soon be done.
Thou shalt know all.
May it make thee shudder.
May it make thy mad rage madder.

ORESTES

Monster, I loved the hero who lies there in his dear blood!
I killed the son of Atreus! I cleft his flesh!
I glory in the thought!
This only saddens me:
That while I slew the father, I slew not the son!
[Orestes throws himself upon her and stabs her.]

ORESTES:

Take that, and that! Die! Cease thy clamoring!

CLYTAEMNESTRA:

[Reeling.]

Well done!—I am killed—ah—

[She falls, then rises on her hands.]

Be accursed!

[She falls back, dead.]

ORESTES:

So, dead at last.

Thy lips defiled the very air men breathe!

[Enter Electra.]

Scene X.

ORESTES, CLYTAEMNESTRA'S BODY, ELECTRA.

ELECTRA:

What hast thou done? my brother! This one crime
Of thine is far more hideous than all
Her deeds. She was thy mother.

ORESTES:

Mighty Gods!

And dost thou weep for her?

ELECTRA:

Alas! and woe,

Woe unto thee! who now must be to me
Both dear and hateful. Oh, what angry God
Prevailed on thee to raise mad hands against
That head, most vile, but sacred! Dolorous blow,
Unexpiable murder! Woe to us!
Why couldst thou not forgive? Ah, brother, woe,
Deep woe to thee! She was thy mother!

[Electra covers her head and flees.]

Scene XI.

ORESTES, CLYTAEMNESTRA'S BODY; THEN THE ERINYES.

ORESTES:

What does it matter?
I have avenged my father's blood; that snake is dead.
All were poisoned by the touch of her fangs.
She slew the man, she sold the son.
She is quiet now, and rests;—I hope, forever.
The righteous Gods may judge me.

How tall she was! [He looks at the body.]
 She seems to be listening.
 I struck to the heart, a sure blow.
 The deed was good. Justice is done.
 All crimes must be atoned.
 They reigned, triumphant, in sacrilegious joy,
 Their hands yet warm with murder.
 Exulting, they thought, "All is ours!—
 "The throne, the heavy sceptre and the old hall of Pelops.
 "We are the Dynasts of Argos, shepherds of men!"
 So I came; I struck, and the tyrants are dead.
 Now must I cleanse their traces;
 She to the pyre, he to the wolves.
 To-morrow, let the people assemble in the Agora;
 The sceptre of gold will shine in my hand;
 Among the valiant chiefs I shall sit like a God;
 And like the sea, murmuring upon the beaches,
 All the Nations of Hellas will acclaim my name and praise my deed,
 Saying, "He has avenged his father and regained his kingdom!"

[He looks at the body.]

Why are thy blood-stained eyelids yet unclosed?
 What wouldst thou have? My heart is hard. I fear naught.
 I did what was best. Enough.
 Stare not at me with bulging eyes!
 I shall bury thee and my sufferings alike in oblivion.
 Spy not upon my steps! Look into Hades,—not at me!
[He covers her face with a fold of her gown. He stretches his arms towards the grave.]
 Father, whom they laid beneath a mound inglorious,
 Come from the starless, endless night!
 Appear to thy son who hath avenged thee!
 I call to thee, beloved shadow, harken!
 Proclaim that in the eyes of Heaven and Hell,
 My deed was right and lawful!

[Two Erinyes rise on either side of the grave.]

Ha! what visioned fright is this? Whence come they?
 Old hags, what do ye here?

[Three Erinyes appear near the body.]

And those? By all the Gods! The haggard masks
 Snarl their dead lips as though about to bite!
 O monsters, wherefore do ye grind your teeth so savagely?
 Begone!

[The Erinyes appear on all sides.]

The ghosts are swarming, hither, thither, everywhere;—
 I am trapped like a bear!
 Anguish clutches my throat;
 This is no dream! I am awake! awake!
 Alas, I know them now! I understand!
 I know ye, dog-like Erinyes of my mother!
 Why are ye silent? Bark!
 Why threaten me with fleshless fingers!
 Ho, wolves of Hades, I await ye! Come!
 Yea, it is true; I slew her;
 See her blood; the ground is soaked with it;

ORESTES

It floods my feet! It burns my hands!
And yet, ye know, O heartless pack,
She killed my father, and I punished her.
There she lies dead; may Hell engulf her
With all her treachery, her rage, her hate!
Now, are ye muzzled, monsters?

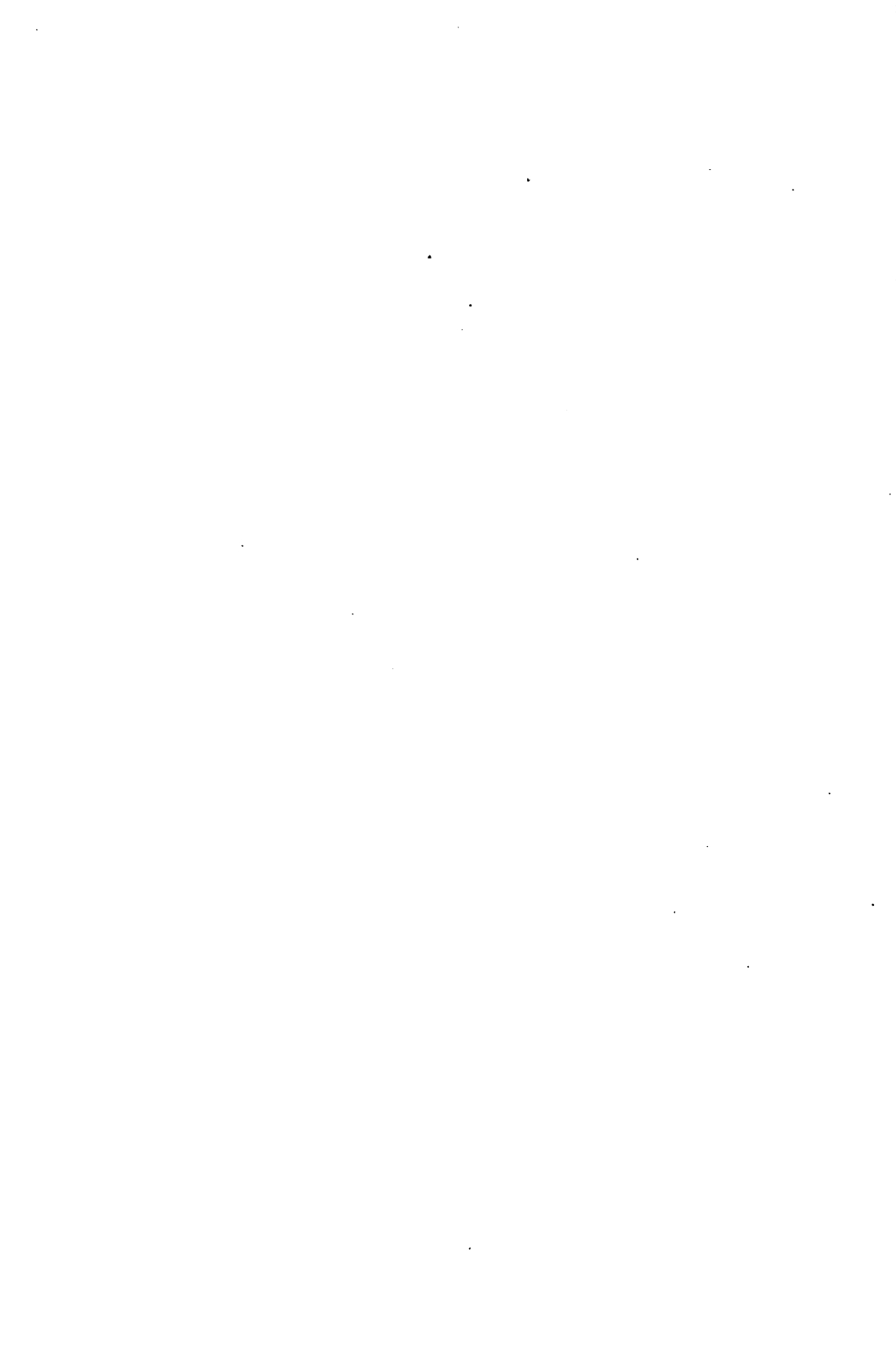
[The Erinyes throw themselves upon him.]

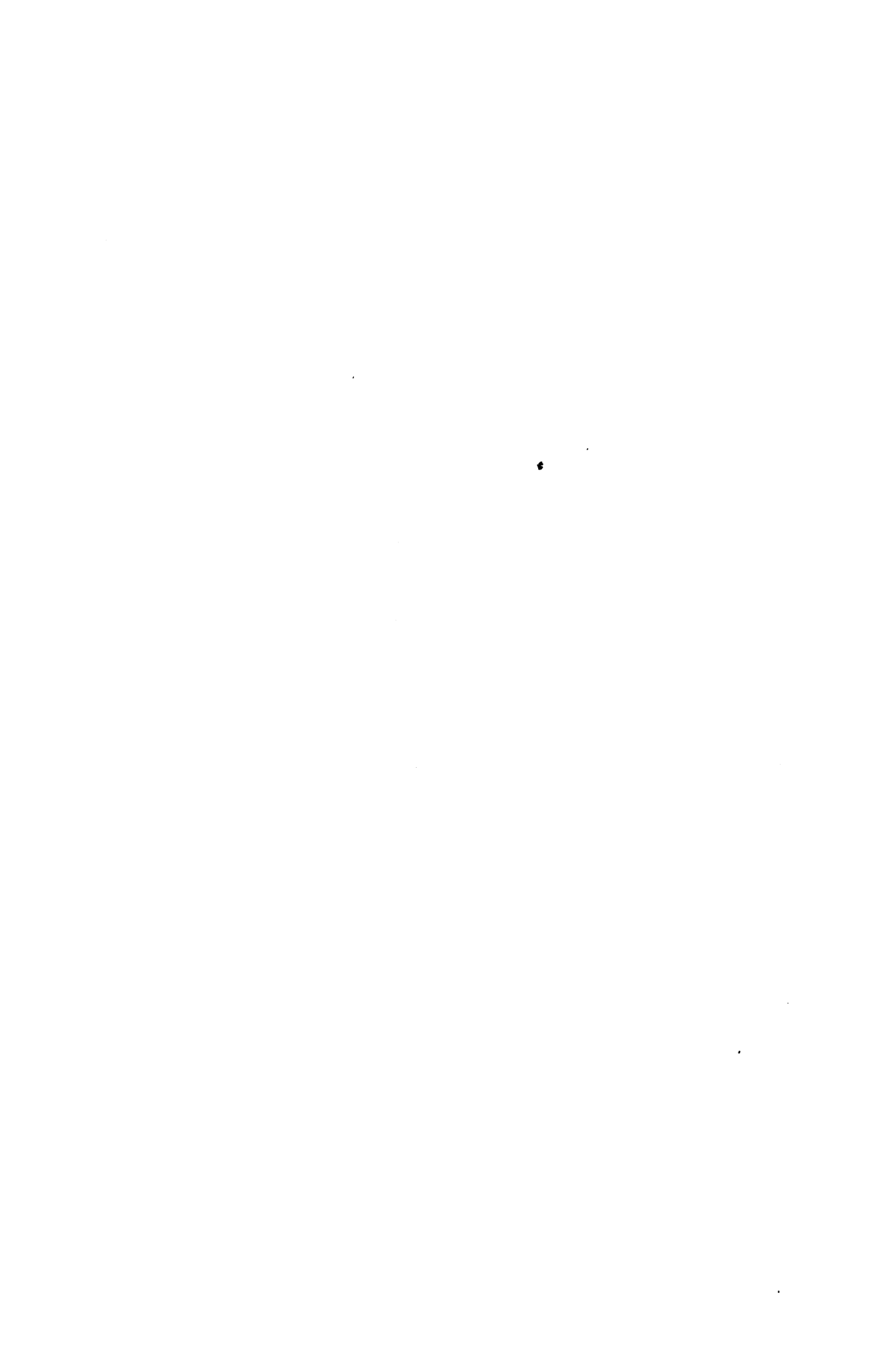
Horror!

[He flees. Other Erinyes bar his way.]

Woe!

THE END.



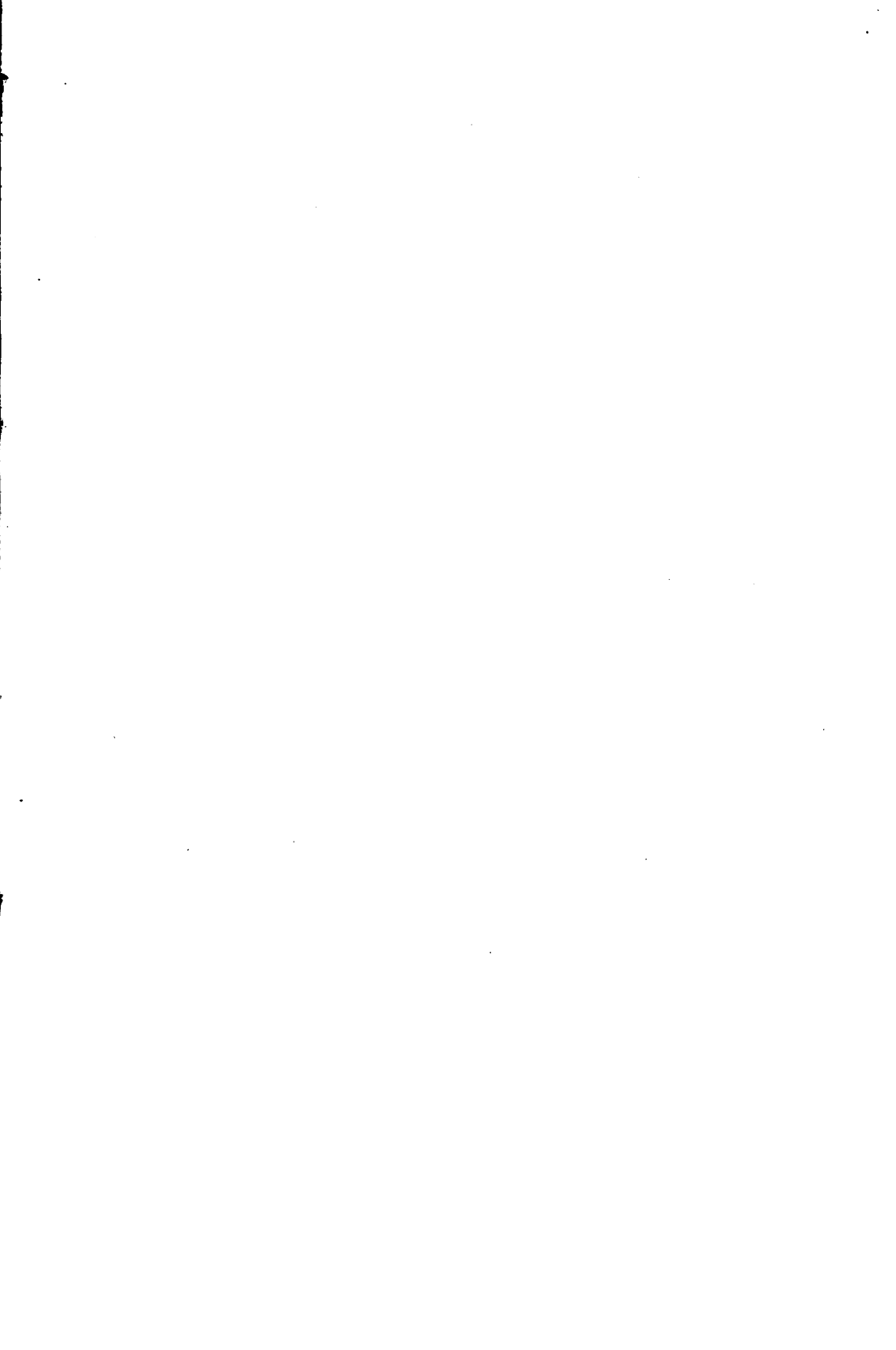














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